United Nations A/68/PV.1

General Assembly

Sixty-eighth session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 17 September 2013, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the President of the General Assembly

The President: I declare open the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: In accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Statement by the President

The President: Three months ago, I stood in this Hall and expressed my gratitude to members for electing me by acclamation as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. Today, I am once again deeply gratified and humbled as I address members for the first time in the singular capacity of President of the General Assembly at this sixty-eighth session. In so doing, I am deeply aware that I am indeed fortunate to have had the distinct pleasure of working with many members as colleagues and friends over a number of years — probably far too many years for us all to recall, assuming that we would want to. It is those years of friendship and good will that give me confidence that I can draw upon our shared sense of past collaboration and partnership to forge a new working relationship, which I hope and fervently believe will lead to a successful conclusion of this session.

At the outset, let me thank my predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić, who presided over the Assembly during its just concluded sixty-seventhe session, for his valuable contributions to its work. Let me also commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the tremendous diligence and commitment he has shown in leading the Organization, and I look forward to working closely with him and his team in ensuring that the General Assembly remains the pre-eminent deliberative body of the United Nations. Because the United Nations is a family of agencies spread throughout the world, let me also recognize the staff of the United Nations and its various agencies for their consummate professionalism and hard work on behalf of so many across our globe.

In the months since my election, I have met with nearly all representatives, either individually or through their regional groupings, to discuss my priorities for the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Those discussions have been both informative and constructive, and they have afforded me the opportunity to hear members' views, priorities and concerns on the Assembly's agenda for the sixty-eighth session. In return, I have had an opportunity to exchange ideas on my theme for the sixty-eighth session, namely: "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". Many representatives shared positive feedback and specific

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

13-47712 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

thoughts about how to enhance the theme and the six events I will be holding, and for this I thank them.

Members' almost universal pledges of cooperation were very encouraging and should make the collective task of tackling the bolder aspects of our work all the more feasible. Dare I hope that this also means a new sense of urgency and an end to protraction and delay in the negotiations and work of this body, so that we can complete the ambitious agenda of our General Assembly in a timely and effective manner? I, for one, hope so.

Many members are now involved in a number of intergovernmental processes that will ultimately feed into the post-2015 development agenda, so they are well aware of the challenges that lie ahead. The upcoming year will prove pivotal for the Assembly as we seek to identify the parameters of the post-2015 development agenda. The magnitude of the task before us will require decisive action and the highest levels of collaboration, and we must prove ourselves and our efforts to be equal to the enormous scope of the task.

To assist members in setting the stage for the aforementioned agenda, it is my intent to convene an equal number — three in each case — of high-level events and thematic debates.

There will be a high-level event to discuss the role of women, youth and civil society in the post-2015 development agenda. We simply cannot reach our development goals or advance human well-being without addressing the needs and challenges of women and youth, while also making use of the contributions of both. As we reminded ourselves at the recent United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio, Governments cannot go it alone in the implementation of any development agenda, so let us therefore explore where and how we can partner more actively with civil society in this regard.

Another high-level event will explore the contributions of human rights and the rule of law in the post-2015 development agenda, particularly looking at the appropriate framework to ensure that human rights, the rule of law and good governance practices anchor evolving policy platforms in a manner that empowers people to contribute to sustainable development.

The third high-level event will look at the contributions of South-South and triangular cooperation and information and communication technologies (ICT) for development in the post-2015 development agenda. Over the past two decades, dramatic global change and national and regional transformations have led to unprecedented and increasingly complex socioeconomic and environmental threats, challenges and concerns. Responding to these new threats and existing challenges will require new forms of collaboration, innovation and partnership, which, in turn, will maximize the potential for ICT to contribute to reaching our development goals.

The concept of partnerships is becoming increasingly important in discussions on the future of development, and rightly so. The Secretary-General has placed renewed emphasis on this area, which is embedded in the eighth and much overlooked Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Technology, capacity-building and knowledge transfer, financing and innovative means of implementation will be critical parts of the coming debate. The new development agenda will require collaboration among all actors, based on mutual trust and respect. Accordingly, one of the three thematic debates will focus on the role of partnership and its contribution to the post-2015 development agenda.

Another thematic debate will examine how to work towards and ensure stable and peaceful societies in the post-2015 development framework, including by creating an enabling environment for development and progress, diminishing external stressors that contribute to conflicts, ensuring accessible institutions of justice, reducing violence and enhancing the capacity and accountability of good governance mechanisms and practices that benefit peace and sustainable development.

The third thematic debate will focus on the roles of water, sanitation and sustainable energy in the post-2015 development agenda. With some 1.4 billion people without reliable electricity, 900 million lacking access to clean water and 2.6 billion without adequate sanitation, action is urgently needed to address those persistent challenges. With so many initiatives in those fields, let us try to draw upon and share the existing knowledge while scaling up the initiatives that have already worked in the areas of integrated water management, sustainable energy and sanitation services for the proposed post-2015 development agenda.

While I have focused my remarks today on my selected theme, the sixty-eighth session will certainly

include a range of other critical issues. A handful of these, such as migration, nuclear disarmament, the MDGs and disabilities will be discussed in the upcoming 10 days. During the session, we will also hold a high-level thematic debate, mandated by the General Assembly, focused on investment in Africa and its role in achieving development objectives.

I am committed to working with all members throughout the sixty-eighth session, providing any assistance that may be required, so that, ultimately, we can set the stage for the strongest possible global development agenda, one that fully respects all people on this, our shared planet.

As I laid out in my acceptance speech, I intend to dedicate significant time and resources to the issues of reforming and revitalizing the main bodies of this institution: the General Assembly and the Security Council. We are all in agreement that reform of these bodies is needed and that it is simply unacceptable to do nothing, since that would pose a major hindrance to the Organization's realizing its full potential and would do an immense disservice to the peoples of the world, who rely on us and look to us with a sense of hope and possibility. To that end, in keeping with the Assembly's decision to roll over this issue from the sixty-seventh to the sixty-eighth session, I will reconvene the Working Group on Security Council reform in mid-October.

I look forward, over the course of the next 12 months, to the active engagement and cooperation of members on the entire agenda of the Assembly. I call on all present to join me in making this a productive and meaningful session, one in which we work in solidarity and collegial respect towards the vision of the Organization as laid out in the Charter and toward solutions to the problems that confront us all. Together we can make this a watershed year in the history of the Organization by building a new and meaningful development agenda that both protects our planet and creates equity, justice and prosperity for people the whole world over.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: It is a great pleasure to join all present for the opening of a new session of the General Assembly. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the President most sincerely once again on his assumption of the high office of the presidency of the General Assembly. As we work together in future in addressing global challenges, I will count on his leadership and global vision in meeting the expectations of billions of people around the world, that is, to realize a life of dignity for all. He can also count on me.

The sense of expectation is clear. We are on the eve of very important work. We will focus on how to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the 2015 deadline approaches. Business, civil society and the philanthropic community will come together to showcase MDG successes.

We will intensify our efforts to define a post-2015 development agenda, including with a single set of goals for sustainable development that we hope will address the complex challenges of this new era and capture the imagination of the peoples of the world, as the MDGs did.

I therefore welcome President Ashe's choice of theme for the general debate: "The Post-2015 Agenda: Setting the Stage". He has also outlined a set of six thematic issues upon which he intends to convene high-level events and thematic debates during the sixty-eighth session; I support his decision to do so.

During the sixty-eighth session, we will also advance preparations for the 2014 International Conference on Small Island Developing States and carry out a range of other important tasks aimed at meeting the expectations of a global public that is looking to us to make decisions and investments that will build a future of prosperity and opportunity.

There will be important high-level meetings of the General Assembly on people with disabilities and on migration. We will focus on a number of urgent peace and security challenges.

I also intend to convene a high-level summit meeting on climate change, and I hope that all members will fully support it and ask their leaders to participate. The exact date will be decided on in close consultation with the President of the General Assembly and the General Committee.

Syria is without a doubt the biggest crisis facing the international community and is likely to figure prominently in the speeches made and meetings held during the general debate segment, and rightfully so. The Assembly has a role and a voice in our efforts to resolve it and respond to the suffering. I will soon have the opportunity to report to members directly after this meeting is over.

However, we also need to look at the broader picture: global development and regional conflict. Concerning regional conflict and peace-related issues, we will hold a meeting of the oversight mechanism for the peace agreement that the United Nations brokered earlier this year for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region.

The Middle East Quartet, consisting of the United Nations, the European Union, Russia and the United States, will meet for the first time in more than a year to support the direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that have recently reconvened.

We will discuss how to support the transitions in Yemen and in Myanmar, and how to consolidate stability following the recent elections in Mali.

Finally, we will also mark the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, a landmark event that led to the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While the Assembly's temporary home may not be as beautiful and evocative as the historic Hall that is now closed for renovation, what matters most is what we do here — the hard work we carry out that will translate what we say from this rostrum into tangible progress for the world's people.

In that spirit, I look forward to the capable leadership and stewardship of President John Ashe during the very important sixty-eighth session. But most of all, I look forward to the dogged determination he has pledged to this work. That is precisely what we need at this crucial time.

As I briefly mentioned with regard to the Capital Master Plan process, during which time the General Assembly Hall has to be closed for renovation, I hope that each and every delegation, particularly the leaders who will be coming, will not be disappointed by the temporary General Assembly Hall. It will last for just one year. I will make sure that, by this time next year, leaders will be able to take the floor in the beautifully renovated General Assembly Hall. I hope that representatives will convey that message.

Let us all work together for success in carrying out our agenda.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 140 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/68/374)

The President. I would like, in keeping with established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/68/374. It contains a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that five Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/68/374?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that, at the beginning of each session, the General Assembly shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the sixty-eighth session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Belgium, China, Colombia, Gabon, Guyana, the Russian Federation, Singapore, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States that I have just mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Organization of work of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly

Letter from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences (A/68/367)

The President: Members are aware that, pursuant to paragraph 7 of section I of resolution 40/243, of 18 December 1985, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

On the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, authorization is thus sought for the following subsidiary organs: the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals; the Committee on Relations with the Host Country; the Disarmament Commission; the Independent Audit Advisory Committee; the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination; the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing; and the Commission on Sustainable Development.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize those subsidiary organs of the Assembly to meet during the main part of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.